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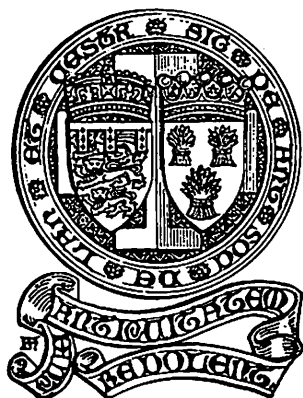
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Samuel Bamford's lost years

Part I: the 1820s

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Samuel Bamford (1788–1872) is not only one of Lancashire's most famous sons but also one of England's greatest writers. In 1816–20 he was one of the leading lights of Lancashire's radical reform movement, and was imprisoned several times. He was one of the local organisers of the rally at St Peter's Fields in Manchester in August 1819, the Peterloo massacre, and his courtroom defence of himself and his cause alongside Orator Hunt brought him fame and celebrity. Even as he served a year in Lincoln gaol, his songs and verses celebrated and rallied the reform movement. Later, in the Chartist years of 1839–48, he published two volumes of autobiography, *Passages in the life of a Radical and Early Days*, which between them covered his life up to his release from gaol in 1821. They constitute not only one of the most important historical sources for the period but also some of its finest writing.

Bamford's modern fame dates from the extensive use of his works in E. P. Thompson's classic *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963). Thompson described his autobiography as 'essential reading for any Englishman', and later wrote that for Peterloo, notwithstanding modern scholarship, 'the first book for the general reader must remain, as it has always been, Samuel Bamford's *Passages in the Life of a Radical*.' The social and economic history boom of the 1960s and 1970s saw the publication of modern editions of the autobiography and of a volume of his collected journalism, *Walks in South Lancashire* (1844), both with useful introductions.²

Bamford however was always much more than a radical. He was at various stages also a weaver, writer, poet, journalist, newsagent, beerseller, constable, civil servant, and public speaker, and for a time in the 1840s a literary celebrity who knew the Gaskells and the Carlyles. In the 1990s

1] E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963; Penguin edn, 1968), p.863; 'Thompson on Peterloo', *Manchester Region History Review* (hereinafter MRHR), iii, 1 (1980), p.67.

2] *The Autobiography of Samuel Bamford* (1967), ed. W.H. Chaloner, vol. 1 *Early Days and an Account of the Arrest* (with Introduction), vol. 2 *Passages in the Life of a Radical*; Samuel Bamford, *Walks in South Lancashire* (1972), ed. J.D. Marshall.

a new wave of writing on Bamford began to appear, written independently by scholars mostly unaware of each other's work. Two locally-published biographies, by Joe Pimlott and Morris Garratt, appeared, the latter rounding up nearly all the very considerable range of printed and pictorial material surviving in the region.³ Essays focused on particular aspects of Bamford's life: his attitudes towards women and gender (he was an early advocate of female involvement in the reform movement); the continuing class-focused discontent of his later life; his involvement with the local wakes and rushbearings; and his sense of northern identity.⁴ The key to Bamford studies was his diary, four volumes covering the years 1858–62 rescued from a wartime waste paper drive and preserved in Manchester Central Library. These were published in 2000, making available a great wealth not just of diary entries but of reminiscences, letters, cuttings and ephemera which carried numerous references to other material and activities.⁵ Samuel Bamford turned out to be the best-documented working man of his age.

It was at this stage that I began work on a biography of Samuel Bamford, a long-term project that remains unfinished although some individual essays have appeared.⁶ The problem has been that, while both his earlier and later years are well documented, at the centre of Bamford's life there lies a large evidential hole. The 1820s and 1830s are Bamford's lost years, comparable to the more famous (but fewer) lost years of William Shakespeare in the 1580s. For both men, these lost years mark the period between leaving their native town in turbulent times and achieving literary success. It is one of several tragedies in Bamford's life that he never managed to write the third autobiographical volume *Latter Days* which he long cherished. He did, however, reminisce in a number

3] Joe Pimlott, *The Life and Times of Sam Bamford* (Neil Richardson, 1991); Morris Garratt, *Samuel Bamford: Portrait of a Radical* (Littleborough, 1992).

4] Catherine Hall, 'The Tale of Samuel and Jemima: Gender and Working-class Culture in nineteenth-century England', in H.J. Kaye and Keith McClelland, eds, *E.P. Thompson: Critical Perspectives* (1990); Martin Hewitt, 'Radicalism and the Victorian Working Class: the case of Samuel Bamford', *Historical Journal*, 34:4 (1991); Robert Poole, 'Samuel Bamford and Middleton Rushbearing', *MRHR*, viii (1994); Martin Hewitt and Robert Poole, 'Samuel Bamford and Northern Identity', in *Northern Identities*, ed. Neville Kirk (2000).

5] Martin Hewitt and Robert Poole, eds, *The Diaries of Samuel Bamford* (Stroud, 2000).

6] Robert Poole, 'The Diaries of Samuel Bamford' in *Middleton Matters 2* (Middleton, 2001); 'On the trail of Samuel Bamford: new evidence of an old radical and his family', *The Manchester Genealogist*, 2001; 'Samuel Bamford', *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, xii, ed. D. Howells and K. Gildart (2005), pp.13–19; 'The March to Peterloo: Politics and Festivity in Late Georgian England', *Past and Present* 192, August 2006, pp.109–153; 'A Letter from Samuel Bamford, probably to William Gaskell', *Gaskell Society Newsletter* 44, Autumn 2007, pp.7–9; "'A Poor Man I Know": Samuel Bamford and the Making of *Mary Barton*', *Gaskell Society Journal*, 2008. All this work was made possible by a Leverhulme Senior Research Fellowship in 2000–1.

of lesser-known writings, and working outwards from these and from clues in the diaries it has been possible to reconstruct a number of significant episodes in Bamford's middle years. They shed vital light on the life of a man whose turbulent public career has led him to be identified as both hero and renegade, radical and Tory, martyr and spy.

The return of the prisoner

Samuel Bamford was probably at his most celebrated while he was a prisoner in Lincoln Castle in 1820–21 for his part in organising the Peterloo rally. For a time he and his fellow defendants were national news.⁷ Soon after arriving in Lincoln gaol two radical papers, the *Manchester Observer* and the London *Black Dwarf*, carried reports of his case, more of his own poems, and verses in his honour.⁸ Henry Hunt commended 'my worthy friend Bamford' and his rousing 'Song of the Slaughter' in an address to reformers, and it was duly sung to solemn effect by crowds gathered all over the country to mark the first anniversary of the Peterloo massacre in August 1820.⁹ At the height of the Queen Caroline affair of 1820, when the King's popular but estranged wife successfully defeated his attempts to divorce her, Bamford's 'God Save the Queen' was sung at celebratory gatherings. It was also included in an address sent to the Queen from Middleton in September 1820, described as 'the *prison-song* of our esteemed townsman and undaunted Bard'.¹⁰

Bamford was briefly feted on his return home in May 1821, and six months later produced a book-length collection of his *Miscellaneous Poetry*, published by the radical London publisher William Dolby. The picture of Britannia with a union flag, a printing press and a cap of liberty on the cover summed up his identity as an old-style radical patriot. In the Preface he described himself in the more conventional humble, rustic manner of other labouring-class poets of the period, though with more than a hint of defensiveness and pride:

In laying before the Public the poems of Samuel Bamford, the publisher is totally unmindful of the swift and bitter arrows of Criticism. His

7] Samuel Bamford, *An Account of the Arrest of Samuel Bamford* (1817); *The Weaver Boy* (1819); *Passages in the Life of a Radical* ii, ch.5. For Bamford's autobiography, chapter numbers only are cited to simplify comparison between different editions.

8] *Manchester Observer*, 20 and 27 May 1820, 8 July 1820, 5 and 19 August 1820; *Black Dwarf*, 24 May 1820.

9] Henry Hunt, 'To the Radical Reformers', 1, 25 July 1820; *Manchester Observer*, 19 August 1820.

10] *Black Dwarf*, 17, 24 and 31 May 1820, 13 December 1820; *Manchester Observer*, 29 July–12 August 1820, 25 November 1820, 10 March 1821; 'Address passed at a Public Meeting held at Middleton, September 19, 1820, to Her majesty Queen Caroline', Norfolk Record Office (henceforth NRO), GTN/11/1.

Author is unlettered. The arrows of Criticism, which, to Book Poets convey bitterness and dismay, fall pointless and powerless against Samuel Bamford. He lives not in books. He sings to the motion of his loom, ruminates by the babbling rivulets of sloping meadows, or tunes his simple reed along the sedgy margin of the distant river.

No mighty Monarch, or 'great Captain', warms the imagination of our Author. His *Jemima* is to him a picture of loveliness; in his native fields alone, he seeks the picturesque, and from the good of his country he draws his conceptions of all that is grand and noble.

He is a poor weaver, of Middleton, in Lancashire; but, at the same time, one whose heart beats high for his country. As a husband, he is affectionate and gentle; as a father, most kind and tender; as a poet, unaffected and simple; as a man, brave and honest; as a subject, such an one that a wise king would secure the esteem of; as an English patriot, invincible, living or dying, as will be seen by his 'Ode to Death'.¹¹

The book included most of the twenty-odd poems he had published in the radical press over the past four years, and in the earlier collection *The Weaver Boy*, together with 26 more. The new material included political poems such as the 'Union Hymn', 'The Arrest' and the melodramatic 'Dying Dragoon', while the rest were mostly pastoral and lyrical. The radical *Manchester Observer* reviewed it, dutifully comparing aspects of Bamford's verse to that of Pope and Addison, and ending: 'The whole collection is highly deserving of the patronage of the admirers of poetry: and to the friends of freedom it is invaluable, as embodying the noblest sentiments, in a manner that renders them universally captivating.'¹²

At the same time, all was not well. Bamford had fallen out with two former allies: his cellmate, the extravagant and peevish 'Doctor' Joseph Healey, and his hero Henry Hunt, who was serving two years under harsher conditions in Ilchester gaol. In a letter described by Bamford as an 'egotistical rant', Hunt complained that Bamford's wife had been allowed to join him in gaol while his own long-term partner, a Mrs Vince, was not. Bamford refused to send him an affidavit setting out his own conjugal visits in support of Hunt's case for the same treatment. There was, he thought, a 'difference betwixt a man being indulged with the company of his own wife, and being indulged with the company of another man's wife.' By the time of his release, he and Hunt had ceased to correspond. Both men could be touchy and quarrelsome; Hunt's biographer John Belchem finds Bamford prudish, while 'Hunt behaved with insufferable vanity and self-pity.' Bamford's comment was blunt: 'Hunt,

[11] *Manchester Observer*, 26 May, 23 June 1821; Bamford, *Miscellaneous Poetry* (1821).

[12] *Manchester Observer*, 10 November 1821.

finding him no longer subservient, had ceased to correspond'.¹³

Passages in the Life of a Radical ends with Bamford's journey back from Lincoln to Middleton in the company of his wife. He recalled the events that followed in the introduction to his final volume of collected poetry, *Homely Rhymes*, in 1864:

Meetings of old friends, and warm greetings by some, were all that could be desired; whilst others, whose friendship had grown cold, or who, in the season of the Author's adversity had proved faithless, viewed his return with but faint tokens of satisfaction. In truth, his appearance in outward habiliment was scarcely that of a sufferer. A friend had helped him to new clothing, and these cold-hearted 'know-him-nots' suspected him of having been 'saving money' during the time he was away.

In part this was the universal effect of long-term political imprisonment, which creates a disruptive gulf of experience between those who suffer it and those who do not. But ever since his shrewd refusal to become involved in extravagant schemes of rebellion in 1817 he had not been entirely trusted by some of his radical colleagues. His release from gaol in London ahead of most of the other suspects of 1817 aroused suspicious comment. While he was in Lincoln one 'hoary-headed slanderer' who (Bamford claims) bore a grudge against him spread rumours that he had sold the Middleton Peterloo banner to the Manchester police for £12. 'A committee was appointed to investigate the charge, and a deputation waited upon my wife, who opened a chest, and pulling out the banner, displayed it.' The slanderer however persisted.¹⁴ Bamford's 1864 account continues:

Sir Charles Wolseley, with his nobly impulsive nature, supplied him with a small sum to commence making goods on his own account. This he found he could not do and compete with the large manufacturer, without the dishonest means of purchasing cheap remnants of weavers' material, and working them into his own goods. This he would not do. He had never, as a weaver, been guilty of keeping back any of his employer's property, and he would not taint his integrity by now abandoning the self respect which he had won as a patriot.

Bamford continued to weave on his own account. He was now a highly-skilled weaver in the buoyant fine silk sector, as illustrated by one story he tells.

13] Bamford, *Passages*, ii, ch.41; John Belchem, 'Orator' Hunt: *Henry Hunt and English Working Class Radicalism* (1988), pp.133-5; Bamford, *Homely Rhymes* (1864), Introduction.

14] Bamford, *Passages*, ch.36.

A beautiful peruche silk warp which, with shoot of the same colour, had been given him to weave, was found to be streaked when the tab appeared into cloth. His employer was concerned, and asked could it not be mended. The Author said it could, and he undertook to make a perfect piece of cloth for a reasonable consideration. This the employer gladly agreed to; and the weaver having a convenient length of 'reach' picked it well, passed the rods to the head, and drew the whole length through the healds and reed upon the cloth-beam; making it even, at times, with pasteboard. This he continued until the whole warp was transferred from the yarn-beam to the cloth-beam; after which the beams were transposed, and the warp was woven, and, in a beautiful piece of cloth, replaced on the yarn-beam. Mr. M—, the employer, was quite pleased, and, without asking how it had been done, gave the weaver 1s. 2d. per yard for the performance; a price which he never before nor since received for any description of weaver's work.

Not long afterwards he found himself accused by the same putter-out, a Mr M—, of returning some of the cloth given to him to weave. Puzzled by the claim but feeling vulnerable as a convicted radical to any accusation of dishonesty, he paid up, only to find later that the account 'was made up of various small fractions of ounces and drams which had occurred during some months'. He put it down to a malicious accusation by a young man whom he had ordered out of his workshop to protect his trade secrets.¹⁵

In 1822, perhaps weary of friction with his neighbours, Bamford, his wife, and their daughter Ann (now aged about twelve) moved out of Middleton to the nearby hamlet of Stake Hill. Two years later his father, Daniel Bamford, died at the age of 72. Although a former Methodist, he was buried in Middleton parish churchyard on 6 February 1824. There is no evidence that father and son were very close; Bamford doesn't mention him at all in *Passages*, or in any other writings dealing with the period after his childhood.¹⁶ Apart from the death of his father, we know nothing at all of Bamford in the three years after he moved out of Middleton. When we next encounter him in 1825 he is once again involved in Middleton's reform politics.

Improving Middleton: the Harbord connection

Between Peterloo and the reform crisis of 1831–2 the issue of parliamentary reform slipped into the background in favour of schemes of social improvement. Middleton's reformers formed a wary but produc-

15] Bamford, *Homely Rhymes*, Preface.

16] *Ibid.* For information on Bamford family baptisms and burials, I am indebted to Doreen El-Alwany.

tive alliance with the absentee Lord of the Manor Edward Harbord, third Earl of Suffield. Bamford wrote about this period in a little-known work with the unprepossessing title *Some Account of the Late Amos Ogden of Middleton*, written in 1853 while he was working for the Inland Revenue in London. The late Amos Ogden was a silk weaver, a reformer, and a former associate of Bamford. The Harbord family papers in Norfolk County Record Office, and the associated Middleton estate papers in Greater Manchester Record Office, shed light on these episodes.¹⁷

In the writings of his later years Bamford was hostile to the Harbords. In 1760 Harbord Harbord, a Norfolk landowner, had married Mary Assheton, daughter of 'Old Sir Raphe', the last of the Asshetons of Middleton. When Assheton died in 1765, Harbord inherited the manor, and through loyal service to the prime minister, William Pitt, in the 1780s, received a title to go with it: Earl of Suffield. The title passed first to his elder son William Assheton Harbord, then in late 1821 to William's younger brother Edward, who had in fact managed the manor of Middleton on William's behalf for some years. Bamford later idealised Sir Ralph as one of a vanishing breed of kindly paternalist landowners, 'living in their own paternal mansions ... in kindliness with their tenants; in open-handed charity towards the poor; and in hospitality towards all friendly comers. There were no grinding bailiffs and land-stewards in those days, to stand betwixt the gentleman and his labourer, or his tenant; to screw up rents, to screw down livings, and to invent and transact all little meannesses for so much per annum.' Under the Suffields, he claimed, the wealth of Middleton had been 'carried out of the country, to be wasted and thrown away like dust, in the pride and big babyism of courtly life ... [or] in the brothels and gambling hells of London, Paris, or other Babylon of the world.'¹⁸

Bamford was being ungenerous here. Edward Harbord, third Earl of Suffield, had indeed done the conventional tour of Europe, in the company of his tutor. As well as enjoying sports, plays and circuses he had visited libraries and factories. Like Bamford (but eight years older) he was both an athletic man (he could bend pokers round his neck) and a great believer in education. He developed firm liberal principles, failing

17] The Harbord family and Middleton estate papers were separated some years ago and the later transferred to the Greater Manchester Record Office to go with the Assheton papers. The material in the family papers in Norfolk Record Office (NRO) contains correspondence on non-estate matters with people in Middleton, including Bamford, Ogden and other radicals. The papers survived the Norwich Library fire of 1994, though there are scorch marks here and there. They were catalogued in detail by Jane Weare and I am grateful for her assistance, and also for that of Rob Lee of the University of Durham who generously shared his own material.

18] Bamford, *Amos Ogden*, and *Early Days*, chs 1–3.

in a bid to become MP for Norwich in 1818 because of his refusal to engage in bribery or coerce votes from his tenants.¹⁹

Harbord finally fell out with his Tory family when he called for an inquiry into the Peterloo massacre at a county meeting in Norfolk in 1819: 'they slaughtered our fellow subjects' he wrote privately of the Manchester magistrates.²⁰ His solution to such abuses of power was to 'make the House of Commons inviolably the organ of the people', but at the same time he was hostile to radical leaders such as Hunt and Cobbett, as he explained in a letter to Amos Ogden:

I consider Cobbett's object to be Rebellion and Revolution to be effected by violence with all its inevitably attendant horrors. My object is Reform, a reform embracing all that honest and reasonable beings can desire, and which in spite of Cobbett I hope to see accomplished without disturbing the peace and good order of society. I wish reform in a multitude of particulars, in our criminal code, in our prisons, in our police, in our Poor Laws ... You are greatly imposed upon if you believe that parliamentary reform would be a sort of *cure all*.

His position was the classic Whig one, that '*reform* alone can prevent revolution' – not dissimilar to Bamford's own. Harbord however had one characteristic which placed him in direct confrontation with Middleton's radical culture: he was a rigid Anglican.

Harbord visited his Middleton estates in 1820, and (relates Bamford) 'induced Ogden, who had previously been a dissenter, to commence going to church. Similar persuasions, or exhortations prevailed on Edward Wrigley, hitherto a Swedenborgian, to attend the church service.' Neighbours doubted the sincerity of such convenient conversions. Bamford continues:

When Mr. Harbord left Middleton, he corresponded with Ogden by letter. In one of his letters he reflected on Cobbett, who at that time was a greater man with the Middleton people than was the young lordling himself. That particular letter, or a copy of it, was sent to Cobbett, who thereupon, attacked Mr. Harbord with his coarsest invectives. Mr. Harbord was considerably annoyed by the whole affair, and during some time his correspondence ceased; but such representations

19] The main printed sources on Harbord are: Richard Mackenzie Bacon, *A Memoir of the Life of Edward, Third Baron Suffield* (1838); Jane Weare, Introduction to *Correspondence and Papers of Edward, Third Lord Suffield, 1794–1835, in the Harbord of Gunton collection at the Norfolk Record Office*, especially ch.4; Jane Weare, 'Edward Harbord (1781–1835), 3rd Lord Suffield: a forgotten reformer, Abolitionist, and Lord of the manor of Middleton' in *Middleton Matters* 2 (Middleton, 2001); H.G.C. Matthew (rev), 'Edward Harbord' in *Oxford DNB* (2004).

20] Bacon, *op.cit.*, pp.84–87, 116–124.

and apologies were made, as induced him ultimately to overlook the matter; and afterwards he frequently corresponded with Ogden, and the Middleton reformers.

This correspondence survives among the Harbord papers in the Norfolk county archives. Encouraged by Harbord's stance on both Peterloo and the Queen Caroline affair, the inhabitants of Middleton invited him to subscribe to their strongly-worded declaration in favour of Queen Caroline. As the radical William Cobbett had also signed the declaration, however, Suffield declined. His letter of refusal somehow found its way to Cobbett, who promptly attacked him in the *Political Register*. Suffield, claimed Cobbett, had only recently become MP for 'the rotten borough of Shaftesbury' through family connections with 'placemen and pensioners' (his sister-in-law was related by marriage to Lord Castlereagh, a minister who was particularly disliked by radicals). Harbord was piqued; he had stood in Shaftesbury because of the failure of his principled stand in Norwich. But he worked to rebuild relations with Middleton's radicals, finding Ogden especially keen to make amends.²¹ So when Bamford was released from Lincoln in May 1821 he found himself supplanted as the mouthpiece of Middleton's radicals by the deferential and pliant Ogden, at the same time as being himself suspected of apostasy by others. It was not an easy position to build upon.

A more serious rift between Suffield and Middleton's radicals happened in the mid-1820s. Bamford's account runs like this:

[Ogden] was also one of three or four persons, who, assisted by some friends at London, established the first Middleton Mechanics' Institution. We got on very well until Lord Suffield having promised us fifty pounds and given us twenty five towards it, we, at his suggestion, altered our mode of proceeding; and as his lordship found the money, we gave him the right to prohibit any book which he deemed unsuitable for readers of our humble class. On this point, he being a strict churchman, was somewhat fastidious; and amongst other books which were removed from our shelves, was 'The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire' ... our selection did not satisfy his lordship; and after some time he withdrew from being President, and did not complete his subscription.

'His lordship', explained Bamford, 'was one of the "Knowledge Diffusion" School of instructors'. The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, which set up the Mechanics' Institutes, was founded in 1824

21] Bamford, *Amos Ogden*, pp.5-6; Bacon, *op.cit.* pp.120-129; Harbord to Middleton Reformers, 11 October 1820, NRO GTN/2; NRO GTN 11/1, letters October-December 1820; *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 4 November 1820. Bamford was in Lincoln gaol at the time and picked up the story later.

as a Whig scheme designed to educate the upper ranks of working men without politicising them. Its publications were famous for their utilitarian dullness; it was mocked as the 'steam intellect society' and made only modest headway with manual workers. Bamford and his fellows sought to provide light reading, and to engage the whole community of Middleton by staging public readings and entertainments. At Suffield's objection, writes Bamford, these too were discontinued. In Middleton, it was almost inevitable that public discussions would involve the airing of radical ideas and criticism of the Church of England.²²

The Suffield correspondence bears out Bamford's account of these events. It also shows that it was Bamford himself who dealt with Suffield on behalf of the Institute Committee. In late 1825 he wrote:

My Lord,

According to the directions contained in your Lordship's letter of the tenth instant, Bolingbroke's Philosophical Works have been removed from the library of the Mechanics Institute at this place, and, with respect to the other books pointed out by your Lordship's communication, I have examined them, and find them to be of a description which cannot but be approved of by your Lordship.²³

Bamford pointedly signed his name without any of the usual polite forms. A year later however he presented 'every wish for your Lordships & your noble Ladys happiness' and signed himself 'Your lordship's Humble Servant', for he had a more delicate task to perform:

The Committee of the Mechanics' Institute having desired me to communicate with your Lordship relative to a work which has been recently purchased for our library ... Gibbons decline and fall of the Roman Empire, your lordship will perceive is among recent acquisitions & it was upon that work that I have been directed to correspond with your lordship. We understand it to be "a capital Book". We had heard great things said of Gibbon & we thought it almost necessary as a conclusion to our Ancient History. At the time the Committee ordered its purchase ... there was a kind of presentiment upon my mind that Gibbons principles were not those of Christianity & consequently not such as your lordship would wish to disseminate ... Your lordship's determination will, therefore, be anxiously looked for by myself and fellow Members.²⁴

Bamford knew perfectly well that Gibbon's work included a hostile view

22] Bamford, *Amos Ogden*, pp.11-12;

23] Samuel Bamford, Middleton, to Edward Harbord, Gunton, 20 Dec. 1825, NRO GTN 18/1.

24] Bamford to Suffield, 15 Nov. 1826, NRO GTN 20/1.

of Christianity as it rose amid the ruins of Rome, and he cannot have been surprised by Suffield's reply:

I cannot without risk of mischief sanction Gibbons book – the 15th ch. of the 1st vol., if I recollect right, aims at the root of Christianity with well disguised infidelity... For these reasons I object to the book in the present instance, but while objecting to it, I feel I may be open to the charge of forbidding the acquirement of historical knowledge generally. I will therefore no longer [be] subject to so painful a responsibility ... I must beg therefore to decline the responsibility attached to the office of President of the Middleton Mechanics Institution.²⁵

The library went into decline and was eventually passed by Ogden into the care of local Chartists and was then dispersed. All in all it was a sorry tale of enlightened patronage poisoned by heavy-handed manipulation.

Notwithstanding this setback, when Lord and Lady Suffield visited Middleton in February 1827 they were accompanied from Blackley to Middleton Hall by a torchlit procession. Gracious speeches were made and deferential cheers rendered up. The local reporter for the London *Morning Herald* was duly impressed, and knew just what to say:

It was a new thing to escort a Peer of the realm and his family into Middleton; such a scene of condescension on the one side, and respectful admiration on the other, has not been witnessed here since the days –

When old Sir Ralph, on winter's morn,
Hath called his lads around;
And taken down his hunting horn,
And taken out his hound.

The people went with the carriage to the Hall door, when in a brief but expressive address his Lordship thanked them for their attention to himself and his family on the present occasion, and expressed a strong hope that the good feeling which in olden days existed betwixt the Asshetons and the people of Middleton, might now be revived and continue. The people cheered his Lordship as he descended into the Hall, and then retired to their homes.²⁶

Despite the recent bust-up over the Mechanics Institute library, Ogden and Bamford were put in charge of distributing Lord Suffield's largesse on this occasion. For some years, Ogden had acted as the distributor of Harbord's annual doles of clogs, stockings, cloth and blankets to the deserving poor of Middleton.²⁷ This time, however, it all went wrong.

25] Suffield to Bamford, 20 Nov. 1826, NRO GTN 20/1.

26] *Morning Herald*, 14 Feb. 1827, quoted in Bacon, *op.cit.*, pp.249–251.

27] Greater Manchester Record Office E7/20/8m Edward Harbord charities in Middleton.

The five pounds which Ogden naïvely agreed would be plenty to treat the inhabitants to refreshments proved embarrassingly inadequate. Bamford took more care with the five pounds which Lady Suffield gave to supply some of the young women with clogs, ensuring that all were well made with shiny brass clasps instead of rusting iron ones; alas, they somehow ended up on the feet of old people rather than the young women they had been intended for. Harbord also gave Bamford and Ogden ten pounds to lay on a dinner for unspecified 'friends', to which they invited 'the most aged, and helpless, and deserving of the old people in the neighbourhood', but 'afterwards found we had made a mistake; Lord Suffield having expected that we would dine our *political* friends; but we had not any such idea'.²⁸ Once again, patronage with strings had gone wrong.

Bamford had been moved to write his memoir of Amos Ogden in 1853 after reading a laudatory obituary of him published in the *Manchester Examiner* and expanded upon in a volume of *Rural Historical Gleanings of South Lancashire* by his Middleton rival, the journalist Joseph Fielding. Whilst retaining some fond memories of Ogden, Bamford felt he had surrendered his principles to become the tame client of Suffield. One episode summed up the difference between them:

On one occasion Amos and I had to go to the hall when Lord Suffield was not there; we entered at the top gates, and went down the flags; and the front door being open, I knocked at it. 'Go round to the back door,' said the steward, in a loud and peremptory tone, from the parlour on the left hand. Amos and I looked at each other; 'no' I said, 'I will not go round to the back door'; Amos however went that way, whilst I walked up the flags again, and awaited him in the market-place. When he came, I reproached him for truckling to such insolence. 'Aye but Samhul,' was his reply, 'all things to all men, as Saint Paul says'; 'a soft answer turneth away wrath,' you know. ... Truly may we say, 'his failings leaned to virtues side,' but it was to the side of a virtue so tame, that at times, itself became a failing.

Bamford, standing on his dignity as a working man, refused to use the tradesmen's and servants' entrance. It was this prickly dignity and independence which fed Bamford's continuing identification of himself as a radical in later life, long after he had ceased to carry the radical torch anywhere near the political battlefield. Ever after, Bamford urged the importance of libraries and the like being run by working men themselves, of staging public readings and entertainments, and of involving the whole community in the business of reform and improvement.²⁹

28] Bamford, *Amos Ogden*, pp.6-8.

29] *Ibid.*, pp.13-14; Hewitt, 'Radicalism'; Poole, 'Samuel Bamford and Middleton Rushbearing'.

Farewell to weaving

While all this was going on, Bamford's own life was changing. Looking back at the economically ruinous year of 1826 he wrote of himself:

He had now ceased to be a weaver, and many of the weavers, some of them his old acquaintances, looked upon him as an alien to their class, and their interests. He never was so, however, but always upheld their cause, and pleaded for their rights whenever their conduct was such as permitted him to do so with truth.³⁰

The lingering suspicions of the radical years provided one explanation for this suspicion, but Bamford's own writings hint at another: his advocacy of free trade at a time when most working people sought protection from the excesses of capitalism. Bamford, in common with other radicals, opposed the corn laws, which in 1815 had imposed prohibitive duties on grain imports in order to protect domestic agriculture. By keeping the price of food artificially high, the corn laws amounted to a 'bread tax' which fell disproportionately on the urban poor. Bamford believed that cheaper food would do more than anything else to allow working people to improve themselves, and his later hostility to Chartism was founded partly on outrage at the Chartists' tactical refusal to support the rival Anti-Corn Law League.

In 1824-5 Lord Liverpool's Tory government proposed a controversial raft of free trade measures which, in an early version of the Thatcher experiment, tested the economy almost to destruction. Among them was a bill to end the national ban on imported silk, which met with a vigorous protectionist response from silk manufacturers. Ogden, Bamford relates, 'was one of those Middleton silk weavers, who, on being requested by their employers, at Manchester, to petition against Mr. Huskisson's bill for the admission of foreign thrown silk, refused so to petition, saying, they would not object to the introduction of that, or any other article, or manufacture, provided, that grain and provisions were at the same time admitted duty free ... We at Middleton, petitioned that silk should be kept back, unless provisions were at the same time let in.'³¹ The measures all went through, and were soon followed by a wave of provincial bank collapses and a severe manufacturing slump. Lancashire saw a revival of Luddism, and for a time in the spring of 1826, with unemployment and food prices both high, the authorities and the military struggled to cope with a formidable wave of attacks on powerloom factories.

Bamford wrote about this episode in a short memoir entitled 'A passage of my later years', published in his volume of collected jour-

30] Bamford, *Homely Rhymes*, Preface.

31] Bamford, *Amos Ogden*, pp.10-11.

nalism, *Walks in South Lancashire* (1844). This passage began, he wrote, 'on the evening of a Friday in the summer of 1826, when so much damage was being done by mobs breaking machinery, in the neighbourhoods of Burnley, Haslingden, and Bury'. In an episode that recalls the abortive Manchester rising of 1817, which Bamford also opposed, he was tipped off about a plan by some in Middleton to join with the loombreakers from this area in a destructive descent on the powerloom factories of Middleton, Heywood and Oldham. Satisfying himself 'that from a dozen to a score of persons of the worst character had got up the plot', Bamford warned several others, including the editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, and then, borrowing some money to see him through the weekend, set off one Sunday on foot on a round trip of some thirty-six miles. He caught up with the machine breakers on the moors beyond Haslingden, overlooking the Ribble Valley and Pendle Hill. He found them pinched with want but dressed in their Sunday best – just as the Peterloo marchers had been years before. Finding himself recognised and respected as a radical leader, he was able to dissuade them from coming to Middleton the next day. In Middleton all was quiet on the Monday, 'to the very public frustration of 'the little knot of villains who had concocted the business on our side of the country.'³²

Local despatches in the Home Office disturbances papers allow us to place this episode exactly.³³ At the end of April 1826 there were attacks on powerlooms in Blackburn, Haslingden, and Bury. The climax came on Wednesday 26 April with an attack by a crowd of some 3,000 on Aitken & Lord's mill at Chatterton near Bury. Troops defending the mill from inside fired hundreds of shots into the crowd, killing several people. 'The obstinacy & determination of the Rioters was most extraordinary and such as I could not have credited had I not witnessed it myself', wrote the officer in charge.³⁴ Bamford's long walk would have taken place on Sunday 30 April, but while he was away all was not as quiet in Middleton as he believed. A crowd gathered on Tandle Hill that day and (wrote the Rochdale magistrate John Crossley) 'proceeded to a Factory, not far distant, into the township of Crompton, and demolished all the power looms, but left all other machinery untouched, this was going on during divine service being performed in the neighbouring churches.'³⁵ On the Monday a crowd again assembled on Tandle Hill and went this time to Rochdale, where they were dissuaded from attacking a factory by a small advance party of hussars.

32] Bamford, *Walks in South Lancashire*, pp.216–227.

33] For other relevant reports see: *Morning Herald*, 29 April, 6 and 9 May 1826; *Manchester Mercury*, 2 and 9 May 1826; *Manchester Guardian*, 29 April, 13 May 1826.

34] The National Archives (hereinafter TNA), Home Office Papers, HO 40/19, esp. fol. 127, Eckersley to Hobhouse, 26 April 1826.

35] TNA, HO40/19, fol. 200, John Crossley to Peel, 30 April 1826.

Nor did all the northern rioters stay away. On the Tuesday a party of five or six hundred people, mainly from Blackburn, Haslingden and Clitheroe, clashed with troops near mills at Oldham and Manchester. The regional military commander General Byng found great alarm in Manchester, and picked up reports of several 'active and expert' groups of powerloom breakers in the area.³⁶ At the same time the veteran Bolton magistrate Joseph Fletcher had his trusted agent Alpha infiltrate the Luddites' network. Bamford's 'little knot of villains', reported Alpha, met on the Sunday of Bamford's walk at the house of George Wolstencroft in Middleton. They included Charles Ridings of Failsworth and a number of other radicals who sought an end to 'the damnable system of Monarchical Corruption' and the national debt.³⁷ In Alpha's estimation, the placards, the personnel, and even the pikes which were brought out of storage, were essentially those of 1819; Bamford would have disagreed. Acting as a sort of central committee this body of agitators met regularly at different towns, but their operations were disrupted by arrests and a week later all was quiet.³⁸

Bamford adds that about a month later, 'at eleven o'clock on a Saturday night, about a hundred and fifty, or two hundred strange men, from towards Manchester, most of them armed, entered the market-place, at Middleton, and called on the people to turn out and bring their pikes. They drew up in line, and repeatedly shouted for their Middleton friends to come and join them. Not a soul responded to their call, and they began swearing and cursing those who had ordered them to come.' They began to demand food and drink at local pubs and shops, but were shortly dispersed by a party of dragoons.³⁹ Again, we can place this episode, for on Sunday 16 July Byng was reliably informed that a party of five or six hundred men from Manchester had set out for Middleton carrying bludgeons, to be dispersed by cavalry. The *Manchester Guardian* also reported the episode.⁴⁰ Fletcher's agent Alpha again reported that Wolstencroft and Ridings were central figures, that a delegate meeting had been previously held at Middleton, and that the object was a general uprising comparable to that of 1819.

36] TNA, HO40/19, fols. 214 *et. seq.* Byng to Hobhouse, 3 May 1826 (two letters), Crossley to Peel, 1 May 1826, and Eckersley to Hobhouse, 3 May 1826. On this generally, see David Walsh, 'The Lancashire Rising', *Albion*, 26 (1995), pp.601-621.

37] It is possible that this Charles Ridings was one of the many brothers of the future poet Elijah Ridings of Failsworth (1803-1872), who also had radical sympathies and whom Bamford knew well. John Evans, *Lancashire authors and orators* (1850), pp.228-232; Sim Schofield, 'Elijah Ridings', *Transactions of the Manchester Literary Club*, vol.41 (1915), pp.477-485.

38] TNA, HO40/19 fol.348, Fletcher to Hobhouse, 6 May 1826.

39] Bamford, *Walks*, pp.226-227.

40] TNA HO 40/20, fol.158 and 404, Eckersley to Byng, 16 July 1826; *Manchester Guardian*, 22 July 1826. The *Guardian* however put the numbers at 200.

Apart from the timing – a month later – Bamford's account, though incomplete, again tallies with the documentary record. He did not know everything, but what he did know he reported accurately. While he soberly dismissed the wild talk of rebellion, he did share with the authorities the somewhat jaundiced view that the plotters' main aim was plunder. His radical credentials from 1819 may still have been current in Rossendale but closer to home they were surely close to running out. The split however cannot be explained solely by Bamford's growing conservatism, for the records also provide evidence for one of his most consistent beliefs: there really were spies spreading lies about him behind his back.

As the powerloom riots exploded in the spring of 1826, the former Manchester radical George Bradbury, arrested in 1817 and now living quietly in Walsall, panicked and turned informer. Using his old connection with the Home Office (for he had also informed in 1817) he kept the authorities supplied with dated and extravagant claims. Samuel Bamford of Middleton, he claimed, was among those conspirators 'connected with near all the Disaffected in this Kingdom'.⁴¹ The Home Secretary, Sir Robert Peel, sent him to Byng: 'Bamford at Middleton is also a violent but cautious member of their Meetings', Byng was informed. Byng kept him on a retainer as agent 'No. 1' and by mid-June he was in Manchester, again trying to implicate Bamford but with no new evidence to offer.⁴² Around the same time Byng secured the services of John Lancashire of Middleton, another radical turncoat, who now became Byng's agent 'No. 2'. Travelling under an assumed name, in August he reported that 'John Jagger, a Weaver at Middleton, has told Him, that He, himself, has been at several meetings – that Bamford is generally among them, but how far he is going, No. 2 cannot say.'⁴³ None of this intelligence was very useful or even credible, but it certainly provides evidence that Bamford's suspicions of espionage were, at least in 1826, well grounded. If either Bradbury's or Lancashire's activities were suspected locally, some of the suspicion may well have fallen on Bamford; yet it was the brittle extremists, not the moderate Bamford, who had proved unreliable.

Three years later Bamford saw an opportunity to improve the weaving trade without conflict. The historic centre of silk weaving in Britain was Spitalfields in east London, but for decades protective legislation had hampered innovation there, shifting growth to other fine-weaving areas including Middleton. In late 1827 the Middleton silk trade was in recession and the weavers, who had only recently gained a pay rise, were on

41] TNA, HO 40/20, fol. 1 *et. seq.* George Bradley (Bradbury) to Peel.

42] TNA, HO 40/20, fols 394, 425, 442, 483. Byng to Hobhouse, Rotherham 15 July 1826; Bradbury to Byng, 16 July, 4 Aug., 20 Nov. 1826.

43] TNA, HO 40/20, fol. 459, Byng to Peel 22 August 1826.

the verge of a strike against pay cuts, 'determined to sacrifice all and be buried without coffins rather than submit to a measure which will deprive them of their means of existence' as Ogden informed Harbord.⁴⁴ But Spitalfields, less prepared to face the winds of competition, was faring worse. In 1829 Bamford wrote hopefully to Suffield, suggesting that after recent 'distruction [sic] of property belonging to the Silk Manufacturers of London, by their workmen in Spitalfields', part of the London silk trade might be attracted to Middleton:

Much might be stated in an advertisement in favour of Middleton as an important station for the Silk Manufacture. The *Land*, as low as your lordship thought proper to rate it; coal at 2½^d per Cwt; its plenteousness of water, both for dyeing and machinery; its abundance of hands, of men, women, and children, most of whom have been rendered familiar with the Silk Manufacture; to which might be added, the trifling amount of its Poor rate; its proximity to the great Northern Mart, Manchester.⁴⁵

There is no record of a reply, but the Middleton silk trade did indeed develop in the 1830s.

Bamford was perhaps willing to put the Mechanics Institute affair behind him because this way of expanding the silk trade pushed all the right buttons. It offered a way of improving the lot of Middleton's weavers by embracing rather than resisting free trade, by uniting rather than opposing the interests of masters and men. It also offered a way of improving Middleton as a town without the kind of factory development to which the Harbords, with their old hall in the centre of the village, opposed; Bamford's letter cannily emphasised the benefit to 'the land'. He still hoped for a resurgence of old-style paternalism and social bonds: 'come back to the halls of your fathers' was his heartfelt appeal to the Lancashire gentry.⁴⁶ Above all, perhaps, it could allow Bamford to regain the trust of his co-workers and validate his position as a mediator between social classes. He sought to speak on behalf of working people with the authority of experience, but to do so in a language the establishment could accept and in service of a consensus agenda of improvement. The appeal to Harbord indicates a significant shift in Bamford's position over the 1820s. No longer a weaver himself, he was the weavers' friend rather than the weavers' ally.

44] NRO GTN/24/1, Ogden to Harbord, 3 December 1827.

45] NRO GTN/31/1, Bamford to Suffield, 6 August 1829.

46] Bamford, *Walks*, p.262; Hewitt and Poole, *Samuel Bamford and Northern Identity*.

Journalist and poet

1826, the year of the powerloom riots, marked a different kind of landmark for Bamford, as he later recalled. 'During the same year he became a correspondent of a London morning paper, and whilst he was so engaged, he never omitted an opportunity of helping the right in its resistance to wrong, and in supporting the weak against the unjustly strong'.⁴⁷ He said much the same to a gathering in Oldham in 1859.

He ... became a correspondent of one of the London papers in the year 1826. Although the post was not very remunerative, still it was more than he obtained at the loom, and he gave the latter up. (Laughter). In that situation he did what he could to expose the deplorable condition of the hand-loom weavers and of the manufacturing districts generally. Whilst attending the petty sessions at Hollinwood and Oldham he used to meet Mr. Samuel Butterworth who came to take reports of the proceedings.⁴⁸

We know that for some years, until 1833 or later, Bamford was Middleton correspondent for the Whig/Liberal *Manchester Guardian*. We also know from his autobiography that in 1819 he had hopes of being taken on as a local correspondent by the London *Morning Chronicle*, but unfortunately the paper was then in the process of undermining its former radical credentials by its hostility to the victims of Peterloo; after a long trip to the capital, Bamford was given the brush-off.⁴⁹ The London paper that Bamford now wrote for was the *Morning Herald*. In a footnote to *Homely Rhymes*, Bamford explains that in 1827, while he was employed as the *Herald's* correspondent, he declined an invitation by its 'worthy and amiable proprietor' to visit him in London, sending by way of explanation a poem, 'London, Fare-thee-Well'.

Should I for the city
Leave the vocal dell?
'Twere indeed a pity –
London, fare thee well!
Whilst my heart's contented,
Let it so remain;
Luxuries unwanted
I can yet disdain.⁵⁰

47] Bamford, *Homely Rhymes*, Preface.

48] *Oldham Chronicle*, 9 April 1859. The report says 'Samuel Butterworth' but it is obviously James who is meant.

49] Bamford, *Passages*, ii, chs 5–6; James Grant, *The Newspaper Press* (1871), i, pp.256–313; H.R. Fox Bourne, *English Newspapers* (1887), i, p.363.

50] Bamford, *Homely Rhymes*, pp.59–60, 235.

The *Morning Herald* was one of the success stories of the 1820s. After almost closing down it pursued a policy of lively and occasionally sensational court reporting, and in the late 1820s nearly overtook the circulation of *The Times*. It was proudly independent ('today the Whigs, tomorrow the Tories' observed one wit), and in 1827 it took up the cause of anti-slavery. After 1832, disillusionment with the Whig government led it to become Conservative. At this period, however, Henry Hunt occasionally wrote for it, keeping the memory of Peterloo alive and providing accounts of journeys to Paris and to the north-west of England. The *Herald's* 'worthy and amiable proprietor' was one Thwaites, who in pursuit of a dispute with another big shareholder was busy spending all the paper's profits on an extensive network of provincial correspondents, including Bamford.⁵¹

Bamford seems to have begun reporting for the *Morning Herald* in May 1826, during the powerloom riots. This would have been an obvious time for a London paper to seek a Lancashire correspondent. Reports from Middleton began appearing on 6 May, in a distanced and slightly alien foreign visitor voice which doesn't exactly match that of Bamford. However, we have to allow for the possibility of editorial changes (as were quite commonly made by Manchester editors to the work of Edwin Butterworth at the same period), and for Bamford's trying on a new, self-consciously journalistic voice. This was something which he later did in his series of 'Walks Among the Workers', written in 1841-2 for the Conservative *Manchester Chronicle and Salford Standard* in the stilted and orotund style of a middle-class social explorer.⁵² The concerns of the *Herald* reports were however very much those of Bamford.

On 6 May 1826 the *Morning Herald* carried a report from Middleton dated 4 May, dealing with the powerloom riots:

Here we are still quiet and unmolested. Politics will now become the order of the day. On Sunday there was a meeting of delegates at Oldham, for the purpose of 'devising the *best and speediest means* of removing the present *general distress*, and of restoring to the English labourer a comfortable maintenance.' This does not induce me to agree with your correspondent at Blackburn in stating that the Radicals are

51] Grant, *op.cit.*, pp.314-324; Fox Bourne, *op.cit.*, ii, pp.15-20; *Morning Herald*, 30 June 1828, 18-19 August 1828.

52] Michael Winstanley, 'News from Oldham: Edwin Butterworth and the Manchester Press, 1829-1848', *MRHR*, iv, 1 (1990); Bamford, 'Walks Among the Workers', *Manchester Chronicle and Salford Standard*, 25 September 1841-5 February 1842. All except the last are reprinted in Bamford, *Walks in South Lancashire*. I am grateful to Anne Secord for passing on her information on these articles. Tracing individual reports in the microfilm edition of a daily paper is a tedious business, and I have only managed to do it for April 1826 to August 1828. There are no Middleton reports between 1 April and 6 May 1826, but it is possible that they began earlier.

endeavouring to get the lead. This is a colouring, and a reprehensible one; for there is enough of distress in the country without aggravating it by introducing party feelings. I expect the affair at Chadderton will produce another Oldham Inquest.

This was the Thursday after Bamford's long walk, and it ties in with what he liked to believe about the limited appeal of 'party feelings'. The reference to the Oldham inquest is also suggestive of Bamford. The Chadderton coroner, Thomas Ferrand, was the same man who had so mishandled the notorious Oldham inquest into the death of John Lees at Peterloo, which Bamford had reported upon.⁵³ What confuses the identification slightly is a report dated Friday 5 May, from Edenfield, filed on the same day as a brief 'all quiet' report from Middleton. Edenfield, a weaving settlement near Bury, was a place which Bamford passed through on his long walk, but this reporter appeared to be travelling by horse and to have talked with the coroner and the local gentry – something which Bamford could not have done as well as walking 36 miles in one day. But this journey by horse may have been a narrative device to unite a variety of observations, some of which involved close personal contact of a kind unlikely to have been made by an educated, mounted visitor. The reporter describes how the military, pursuing some of the rioters attacking Aitken & Lord's mill, broke into a widow's house in Chatterton, shooting one man in the back and threatening the women inside with death. Inviting one witness in a pub to 'sup wi' me', he receives information which he reports in dialect:

George Frith o' Rawtensta' is deein, they sen. He's o young chop, wed, een as tall as yursel. Hee'r shot in at the breast, an' it coom eawt at his back. He deein, they sen, but it dees no matter so mitch fur heir welly dyed afore, fur want of summut to eat.

The use of Lancashire dialect was unusual at this period, especially in news reports for the London press, and a genuine visitor is unlikely to have deployed it. The report goes on to describe the effect of the factory system on the landscape:

The disturbed district comprises a bold and splendid country – moors, high, bare and dark; green and smiling valleys, with clear rock-springs, streams, and cottagers, seemingly happy. Here should be the home of a strong and giant race – husbandmen and warriors. But the rocks are hewed to build factories; the streams, that ought to swim through verdure and softness, are collected in sluices and dams, for

53] The Tory *Manchester Mercury*, in an editorial on 9 May 1826, denounced Ferrand's 'mischievous' conduct of the inquest, which returned four verdicts of justifiable homicide, one of accidental death and one of wilful murder.

the purposes of cotton manufacture, that monster of England – that bane of life.

The prose here seems to anticipate Bamford's 1850 description of the 'green fields and brown moors of south Lancashire' where men 'spin threads, weave cloths, hew coal, cut stone, weld iron, and saw wood; who level hills, fill up vallies, turn back rivers, melt rocks, and rend the earth to her womb'.⁵⁴

On Sunday 8 May the Middleton correspondent sent in two reports. The first was a brief account of a skirmish between the rector and a local tradesman over seizure of goods for the non-payment of church rate, in the course of which an agent of the rector's apparently picked the pocket of one of the tradesman's allies. The manner of telling is typical of Bamford, with an eye for the significant human detail that conveys a wider political point.⁵⁵ The second report noted that Burton's large powerloom mill near Middleton had, remarkably, not been attacked, even though it had been stormed by a mob of outsiders to Middleton in 1812 (as described in *Passages in the Life of a Radical*). The reminiscence that followed could only have come from a local:

During the cloudy days of the years 16 and 19, there was but one special constable in the town (and he was an Orangeman and sought the office), and that not a single soldier was quartered amongst us – that no outrages, no attack upon person or property ever took place, and that not so much as a window was broken – save the said constable, that amongst other things, broke a man's skull.⁵⁶

On 9 and 10 May the *Herald's* reporter was in Oldham and Royton, reporting (again with some dialect) on a weavers' delegate meeting which passed a resolution against the corn laws, and on the hasty disbandment of the recently raised local Yeomanry cavalry:

So great was the alarm at the time they were called upon, that individuals of the corps paid eight, and others ten pounds, and a complete equipment, for a substitute. The Oldhamers laugh and impute it to personal alarm, but I think a more liberal construction may be afforded, and my opinion is, that those offers were caused by a reluctance to come into contact with their neighbours, lest, in the performance of duty, blood should be shed, and they become identified with another most distinguished corps, and obtain, like them, an insupportable fame.

Once again, this chimes in with what we know of Bamford's views on

54] *Morning Herald*, 9 May 1826; Bamford, *Dialect of South Lancashire* (1850), Introduction.

55] *Morning Herald*, 10 May 1826.

56] *Ibid.*, 11 May 1826.

local people who signed up with the authorities against their neighbours, and with his enduring hatred of the Manchester Yeomanry, stained by the blood of Peterloo.⁵⁷

Bamford's work for the *Morning Herald* raises the possibility that the account of the visit of Lord and Lady Suffield to Middleton in February 1827, quoted earlier, was by him. The deferential style is unlike Bamford, and his local rival Joseph Fielding is another possible candidate. But Bamford did, as we have seen, have an abiding belief in the power of closer contact between gentry and working people to heal class relations if properly managed. The torchlit spectacle of the return of a liberal lord to one of the halls of his fathers had undeniable power, and a celebratory report in a London paper might have seemed a way of promoting social reconciliation. The possibility that Bamford wrote this piece remains open.

The *Morning Herald* in this period carried other occasional reports of events in Middleton, mostly character sketches with snatches of dialect very much in Bamford's style. One told of a fight between an estranged middle-aged couple in Rochdale, who had both made their second marriage to each other. Done with an ear for dialect and an eye for the comic touch, it recounted how he had returned to claim his possessions, only to find that she had sold them to pay for her keep. There was also a story about the 'singular and mysterious circumstance' of a married woman who claimed to have been pregnant and who disappeared on the way to lie-in at her father's house on Shaw. She reappeared later, claiming to have given birth to still-born twins somewhere near Royton, but her story fell apart when she was taken into custody and examined by a male midwife who declared that she had never been pregnant at all.⁵⁸

Well-told though Bamford's news stories were (as they would have to be to engage readers as far away as London) they could not have earned him a regular income; even the indefatigable Oldham scribe Edwin Butterworth found it hard to make a living as a newspaper correspondent. Editors at this period often paid by the line; they wanted brief, functional news reports, not elegant and detailed accounts of social life, as Butterworth found to his cost. If Bamford earned a living from journalism in this period he must have earned it from the *Manchester Guardian* and other local papers. If it could all be tracked down, a collection of Bamford's journalism for this earlier period would throw valuable light on life in the weaving districts during the industrial revolution, as well as providing a lively series of sketches towards the unwritten third volume of his autobiography.

57] *Ibid.*, 12 May 1826. This issue will be discussed in part 2 of this paper; it was to blow up in Bamford's face in the 1830s.

58] *Ibid.*, 14 August 1827, 26 and 28 August 1828.

Bamford also continued to write poetry. We know little of what he wrote and when between the publication of his radical *Miscellaneous Poetry* in 1821 and his much more domestic *Hours in the Bowers* in 1835. Two of the finest poems in the latter collection, however, turn out to date from the 1820s. On 18 August 1827 the *Morning Herald* published 'The Pass of Death', signed simply 'B.' It was a response to the death of the prime minister George Canning, whose funeral was reported in the same issue and whose death had provoked sharply divided comments including a forceful denunciation by William Cobbett. On the one hand Canning had been a member of the repressive governments of the late 1810s and had caused outrage (as well as laughter) with his dismissal in the Commons of the complaints of ill-treatment made by one of the political prisoners of 1817, 'the revered and ruptured Ogden'. On the other hand, he had at least been the enemy of the hated Castlereagh, with whom he had duelled, and had more recently supported national independence movements in south America. He was a 'Liberal Tory' and a free trader. Bamford was capable of powerful poetic denunciations, but his response to the death of Canning was an eloquent 'so what?':

Another's gone, and who comes next,
Of all the sons of Pride?
And is humanity perplex'd
Because this one hath died?
The sons of men did raise their voice
And cried out in despair,
'We will not come – we will not come,
Whilst thou art waiting there!'

But Time went forth, and dragg'd them on,
By one, by two, by three;
Nay, sometimes thousands came as one,
So merciless was he:
And still they go, and still they go,
The slave, the Lord, the King;
And disappear, like flakes of snow
Before the sun of spring.⁵⁹

Six months later the paper carried another poem signed 'B.', entitled: 'Provincial Politics; or, a tale told in Lancashire, by Al'brella of Mornin' Gaze'.⁶⁰

Another Bamford poem, perhaps his finest, can be traced to the 1820s. In his diary on 13 January 1829, the young George Shaw of Saddle-

59] *Ibid.*, 18 August 1827.

60] *Ibid.*, 28 February 1828. Perhaps coincidentally, Bamford's birthday was on 29 February.

worth complained of the intrusive custom of asking people where they were bound and what they were doing. 'The following stanza', he wrote, 'which was copied from a Manchester newspaper, some time ago, tends to corroborate the above with respect to Rochdale.

I stoode beside Tim Bobbin Grave
At looks oer Rochdale tewne
And th oud lad rustled in his yearth
An said, '*were arto beune*.'⁶¹

Here is independent confirmation of Bamford's ear for dialect. It also suggests that his output of verse was fairly steady over the period, motivated by occasion and inspiration. Whatever the financial and political pressures of these years, Bamford seems to have maintained an inner integrity, and to have developed that ability to see his own time in historical perspective, which was to prove so powerful an asset when he began to write up his memoirs a decade or so later.

* * *

We can see at work in the 1820s all the elements in Bamford's life which caused his radical commitment to be questioned: the suspicion of others that he had done rather too well for himself in prison; the alienation from former allies and neighbours brought about by his year-long incarceration; his investment in the hope of social reconciliation between gentry and people despite some chastening experiences; his limited and conditional support, as an ex-weaver, for the weavers' cause; and his becoming a professional (or at least semi-professional) journalist, writing for papers whose support for popular causes was decidedly intermittent. Bamford clearly felt his own position to be consistent, but there were certainly others who felt otherwise; time and experience had changed him.

In relation to working-class reformers, Bamford saw himself as a sane and moderate spirit and an agent of social reconciliation. In relation to middle- and upper-class reformers, he saw himself as an uncompromising advocate of the true interests of working men. He was willing to rage but not to conspire, to compromise but not to bow and scrape. His experience as an imprisoned leader of the march to St Peter's Fields gave him authority, but he overdrew his credit. The need to earn a living required him to appeal to both sides at once, even as, on a personal level, he fell out in both directions. The resulting conflicts and compromises reinforced his own sense of isolated righteousness at the same time as it fed the distrust of others. It was an unstable and explosive mixture, and it has ever since made it difficult to read the true Bamford.

Between the ages of thirty-three and fifty, in what might have been his

61] Diary of George Shaw of Saddleworth, formerly in Manchester Central Library Archives, now in Oldham Local Studies. The emphasis is Shaw's.

prime years as a writer, Bamford's only published book was a volume of poetry. Despite its sense of immediacy, *Passages in the Life of a Radical*, which was begun in 1839, was the work of a man looking back across a gulf of experience with a sense of profound change in everything but human nature. We might suppose that he would have been ready to write it by the end of the 1820s; certainly the reform battles of 1829-32 would have provided a good setting for those of 1816-20 to be recalled. In fact it was to take another decade, until the Chartist period, before Bamford managed to tell his life story.

If the 1820s for Bamford had been a time of change, the 1830s were to be his decade of disaster. The long-awaited 1832 Reform Act was followed for Bamford not by vindication and laurels (as would later be his reward after the repeal of the corn laws) but by a bruising series of public rows which made enduring enemies of some former supporters. At times he would find himself aligned with the local Tories who had persecuted him during his radical years. Ahead, too, lay the death of his only child. Bamford, Lear-like, was to be embittered, broken and transformed by these events. Only then, perhaps, did he become sufficiently distanced from the events of the age of Peterloo to be able to write his autobiography. These events will be explored in the second part of this article, which will complete the story of how the young man imprisoned for radical activities in England's darkest decade became the mature writer responsible for one of the greatest of all English autobiographies.